

# Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice

## Accomplishments

1991-present

### **I. STRENGTHENING CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE CONFERENCE**

- During the summer of 2005, the Governor's Task Force sponsored six sessions of a statewide conference entitled "Strengthening Child Welfare Practice." The conference was for child welfare workers and supervisors. A total of 855 caseworkers and supervisors attended.

### **II. FORENSIC INTERVIEWING**

In 1998, GTF worked with the DHS and Debra Poole, Ph.D., Central Michigan University, to develop the Forensic Interviewing Protocol.

In 2004, the Task Force, along with non-Task Force members, completed a reassessment of the Forensic Interviewing Protocol and its implementation. The document has been published and disseminated statewide. The updated protocol is currently being trained statewide and provides a refresher and best practice application for those using the protocol.

### **III. SUMMITS**

There has been an annual fall summit sponsored by the Task Force since 1995. There have been approximately 150 attendees including judges, prosecutors, attorneys, law enforcement, agency staff and other child welfare advocates each year. The themes have varied over the years on issues related to child welfare. The topic each year is chosen in response to needs and interests expressed by key professionals who attend the Summits, or may be reflective of concerns brought to the attention of the Task Force.

### **IV. CHILD DEATH REVIEW TEAMS**

A subcommittee of the Task Force developed recommendations for implementing Child Death Review Teams (CDRs), and a model protocol was developed in April 1995. Training is partially supported with Task Force grant funds in cooperation with the Department of Human Services and Department of Public Health. In 1996, 17 counties established teams as demonstration projects funded by the Task Force. The success of the demonstration projects led to the inclusion of funding in the Governor's 1998 budget to support expansion to all 83 counties. There are now trained, organized teams in all of the counties. Task Force members continue to act as advisors to the Project Coordinator.

The state developed and implemented four regional Child Death Scene Investigation Trainings throughout the state in 2003. These were advanced trainings for child protective services workers, law enforcement and medical examiners. Participants learned skills in differentiating homicides from accidents, conducting thorough scene investigations, interviews and interrogation skills, and development of interagency, coordinated protocols.

The CDR program annually conducts a two day Team Member Training. The training curriculum consists of over thirteen hours of information on topics ranging from how to hold effective CDR meetings, adolescent suicide, abusive head trauma, to child death prevention.

## **V. CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS**

States were mandated to organize Citizen Review Panels in 1999. The panels were charged with evaluating policies and procedures of state and local agencies, and the effectiveness of the state agency in fulfilling its child protection responsibilities. Additionally, they are to review coordination between the state CPS, Foster Care and adoption program, and to review child fatalities and near fatalities. There are three panels in Michigan as required by the Federal Child Abuse and Prevention and Treatment Act:

1. Citizen's Review Panel on Prevention.
2. Citizen's Review Panel on Children's Protective Services, Foster Care, and Adoption.
3. Citizen's Review Panel on Child Fatalities.

The Panel continued to focus on services to meet the emotional needs of children in out-of-home care. It was concerned that children displaying "problem" behaviors were indiscriminately referred for counseling services and those with more severe emotional needs were experiencing several disruptions in placements. The meetings focused on reviewing the placement histories of approximately 75 children under the age of 12 years who had experienced multiple foster home and residential placements. After reviewing the cases and having presentations from a child psychiatrist and representative of Michigan's children's mental health system, the Panel concluded that the state needed to improve its policies and protocols for caseworker referrals for mental health evaluations and on-going counseling services. The panel recommended a complete review and assessment of the current policies and procedures for assessment and treatment of children in foster care be undertaken by outside experts. The Panel identified two psychologists from Wayne State University with extensive experience in working with abused or neglected children. The Department of Human Services (DHS) contracted with them to review and evaluate current DHS policies and practices and to recommend improvements. The report, *Assessment and Treatment of Children in Foster Care*, was presented in June 2003. The Panel sent the report to the DHS in January 2004 for review and comment. The DHS Director responded in 2004 that the report was compelling and its findings and recommendations would be included in the strategic planning process.

The Panel participated in the Program Improvement Plan for the CFSR process with members serving on the work group to develop the self-assessment, being a team member for the on-site review, and advising in the program improvement plan process, quarterly reports and other issues surrounding the PIP in 2005.

In 2005, the CRP explored policies and practices for children currently in the Foster Care System who die, as well as policies concerning children who are unable to be located while having an active Foster Care case in the system. In February of 2005, the CRP completed a comprehensive case review of four children who died while in foster care and a summary review of three children who died while in foster care. Upon the completion of these reviews, the CRP submitted a report to the full Task Force. The CRP planned on making recommendations to DHS regarding this issue. After its review, the CRP found that the deaths of these foster care were of natural causes of medically fragile children. As a result, no recommendations were made to DHS.

The CRP is currently in the process of determining what area they want to review and their goals for that review. The CRP is looking at Michigan's results in the CFSR regarding permanency for foster children. The CRP wants to look at where Michigan is failing, looking at possible causes, and making recommendations to DHS on how this area can be improved.

## **VI. ATTORNEY TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT**

Following the American Bar Association final report on implementation of the lawyer-guardian ad litem statute in November 2002, the Task Force approved a comprehensive project to address some of the issues in that report. The Task Force, through the Department of Human Services, developed an interagency agreement with the State Court Administrative Office.

The protocol and training project has greatly improved the legal representation of children by L-GAL's as well as appointed counsel for the parents.

A representative group of lawyers, judges and social workers and members of the task force developed the L-GAL manual. It has been distributed to Family Court-Juvenile Section judges for redistribution to appointed counsel. Trainings were done for L-GALs. There have been approximately **900** attorney's trained in the LGAL curriculum statewide.

In March of 2005 the State Court Administrator's Office through the funding of the Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice put on a two-day working conference on, "Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care" and in March of 2006, a two-day working conference on, "Mental Health Needs in Child Welfare: Addressing the Needs of Children and Families".

The Task Force has taken the success of the L-GAL training and adapted a similar curriculum for Prosecutors and Attorney's General who represent the Department of Human Services in Child Welfare Cases. The curriculum for this training has been developed. An agreement has been made with the Prosecuting Attorney's Association of Michigan (PAAM) to administer this training. Due to the small number of prosecutors/assistant attorney generals actively involved in child protection proceedings, it is anticipated that two to three regional trainings would be sufficient.

Through the interagency agreement between SCAO, SCAO will be putting on a series of three trainings for child welfare workers and professions on communication issues during the summer of 2006.

SCAO is also finalizing the Education Resource Guide that was developed from the 2005 conference and anticipate its release by the end of the summer. This is designed as a tool for attorneys, judges, and foster care workers.

Additional publication efforts may include an updated Child Welfare Law Source Book (last revised in 2000), and a revised Absent Parent Protocol.

Copies of the Child Welfare Law and Practice book, edited by Donald Duquette and Marvin Ventrell, have been obtained through funding provided by the GTF and will be provided to attorneys at various trainings over the next year.

## **VII. VIDEO RECORDING OF CHILD INTERVIEWS**

The Task Force organized a subcommittee to explore the pros and cons of video recording child interviews. The subcommittee determined that video recording should be done on a pilot basis and an evaluation conducted by Wayne State University. Wayne State has coordinated data collection. Pilot sites were selected in Bay, Macomb, Ottawa, and Wayne County. These sites are representative of the State as a whole. Video recording equipment was installed. Counties began collecting base line data for evaluation purposes. Legislation was drafted and introduced in 2002 to insure the confidentiality of the video recorded statements. It became law March 31, 2003. All four sites are operational.

The Task Force passed a resolution of the following language “The Governor’s Task Force on Children’s Justice supports as a best practice the video recording of investigative forensic interviews of sexually abused children at child advocacy centers or a similarly program.” The Task Force will look into supporting further funding of video equipment in other counties statewide.

## **VIII. MUNCHAUSEN’S SNYDROME BY PROXY (MSBP)**

In 1999, a subcommittee on Munchausen’s Syndrome by Proxy was developed. The subcommittee was chaired by an attorney and included a judge, another attorney, a therapist and two DHS staff liaisons, two physicians, a pediatrician, an OB/GYN specialist, and a clinical psychologist.

This subcommittee developed the 24-page protocol-type document entitled “Munchausen By Proxy-A Collaborative Approach to Investigation, Assessment and Treatment”. It encompasses the responsibilities, and establishes guidelines for each discipline that would be involved in a MSBP case investigation. The Task Force funded the development, printing, distribution, and training of this protocol.

## **IX. CHILD WELFARE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Task Force has approved a training proposal from Michigan’s Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board (MDVPTB) to conduct a mandatory training of CPS workers to enhance

cooperation between CPS and DV staff; educate CPS on domestic violence and the new CPS policy regarding domestic violence, and other areas.

#### **X. WEB-SITE**

The Task Force is working on developing a web-site for the Governor's Task Force.

#### **XI. MICHIGAN PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE CONTRACTS**

The task force has approved two contracts with the Michigan Public Health Institute. One contract will support a planning process to determine the feasibility of and the development of the Michigan Child Death and Severe Injury Coordinated and Comprehensive Investigation Protocol. This protocol will include a core investigative tool to be used by any investigator for any child death or severe injury. Separate but inter-related sections would also be used, depending on the type of death or injury.

The second contract is to conduct a one-day, statewide training for professionals from multiple disciplines entitled, "Abusive Head Trauma: Investigation, Identification, Treatment and Prosecution".

#### **XII. UPDATE OF RESOURCE BOOK**

The task force has approved funds for the update of the guide, Guidelines for Achieving Permanency in Child Protection Proceedings. This guide was initially published in 1999 and has not been updated since that time. The guide is intended for use by persons involved in family court protective proceedings, such as attorneys, LGALs, Judges, etc. The guide will be updated to include changes in state and federal law, court rules, and any other changes.